

Interview with Simon Heaton

Head of Executive Recruiting for Walmart (Asia)

2011 was a big year for Hong Kong-based Simon Heaton. In just 11 months he built Walmart's Asian executive recruiting team, which today sources 80 percent of its hires directly as opposed to through recruitment agencies. We recently spoke with Simon to learn more about the realities of recruiting in Asia in 2012.

The economy continues to occupy the headlines in Europe and the US. What's the mood across Asia and how is it affecting the way you recruit?

Our business is in a different place to most. Our challenge is growth – how do we grow big and fast enough in our region?

What skill sets are hardest to find in Asian markets? How is your team finding those people?

Our main challenge is that organized retail hasn't existed to the same extent in Asia as it has in the West. We have to train people. We also repatriate Asian professionals who've developed the necessary skills in established markets. LinkedIn has been a key resource for us in finding populations in the US and UK with Asian backgrounds and Western retail training. Then comes the challenge of convincing them to move home.

How do professionals react to passive candidate recruiting in your markets?

We've found them extremely open to it in some countries. Social media is being rapidly adopted in China and India in particular. My first approach is typically an InMail, and we've seen a response rate of around 40 percent in China, on a par with the US. In India, it's almost 100 percent! In a market like Japan however, it's harder because there isn't the same emphasis on building your personal brand. But we're brainstorming ways to work together with LinkedIn on changing professional attitudes.

“LinkedIn is transformational. It has transformed how I recruit.”



Simon Heaton

Head of Executive Recruiting,
Walmart (Asia)

Hong Kong | Retail

What successes are you most proud of achieving at Walmart in Asia so far? What role have LinkedIn Recruiting Solutions played in that success?

My greatest success to date is recruiting the senior leadership team for our e-commerce business. Within six weeks we had the team recruited and onboarded – 100 percent through LinkedIn Recruiter and other mapping exercises. Recruiter is the fastest way for us to find the right people, though of course you then have to convince them to interview and so on.

Through LinkedIn Recruiting Solutions we've significantly sped up the process of finding where people are. Within a very short time frame we can now develop a robust list of potential candidates to discuss with the hiring manager. All in all, the tools are incredibly good value as long as people continue to respect LinkedIn as a business networking tool, which I believe they will.

LinkedIn Recruiter has also given much broader reach to some of the roles we recruit. When I started in recruiting back in 1997, I didn't even have a computer. I had a rolodex, a phone, and my relationships. We recently hired a senior leader in Asia whom I wouldn't have found previously, because she didn't work for an organization we would have considered as part of our target list. But she came up when we searched on LinkedIn and she ended up being by far the most qualified candidate.

How does your in-house role suit you?

I got tired of working in the search industry where everything becomes about the fee. Today I get most of my satisfaction from helping people, from seeing them progress in their careers. I've recruited 150 director-level and above professionals for Walmart in the last three years. 95 percent of them still work for the company, and 25 percent have been promoted.

What's interesting is that LinkedIn is more than just the tool that helps me introduce them to the company. LinkedIn also helps me keep track of their career progress at Walmart. We use internal systems, but quite often it's faster to pull up a LinkedIn profile if you're comparing internal and external candidates.

What's the single biggest thing on your mind as you prepare for a new year of recruiting?

For us it's about finding the best people in the lowest total cost way. I don't mind paying a headhunter for someone who will transform our organization. How do you find the people who are the best possible bet for the business? How do you tie together sourcing, referencing, making sure people fit with us culturally, onboarding them and helping them be successful? Psychometrics are not perfect; how do we get better at predicting people's overall fit for the position?

Complete the sentence: LinkedIn is...

Transformational. It has transformed how I recruit.

For more interviews and best practices from corporate recruiting leaders, go to <http://talent.linkedin.com/blog>.